

WORKING TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION

The first three modules in this series lay the foundations for a biblical worldview. They give us a framework for understanding life and for making sense of what it's about. The first module, *The God of Commerce*, helps us check our understanding of God against His true revelations of Himself. The second, *Mankind in the Marketplace*, addresses the principal object of God's love: us. Therefore, an accurate understanding of who God is, and who we really are, is necessary for getting a true picture of reality.

The third module, *The Kingdom and Purposes of God*, gives us the script. It unfolds the eternal story and fits us into it. It gives us the big picture. We are called to be citizens of God's eternal Kingdom, living out His purposes and ways in the here and now. We are participants in the great cosmic drama.

These three modules have laid the foundations. Now we're ready to investigate our daily lives. For most of us, everyday life revolves around three things: *people*, *work* and *material resources*. How we do in these areas—the way we relate to the people in our lives, how we approach our work and how we manage our resources—must be aligned with the Kingdom and purposes of God. As that alignment takes place, we will be increasingly in tune with what God requires of us.

THE PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES

While praying to His Father, Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”—John 17:3. Our lives must be founded on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The impact of this primary relationship expands out to and enriches all subsequent relationships.

Life is about relationships. We work and manage our material assets to provide for ourselves, our families and others. We expend time and energy nurturing our social relationships, such as our friendships with neighbors and business associates. We even try to keep track of our high school classmates. People are important to us. When we near the end and look back at it all, the people we shared our lives with will be the most significant aspect of our life. Our regrets will be over the ones with whom we didn't relate well. Our other achievements, whatever they might have been, will be secondary.

It is difficult for us to keep this priority in focus. The consuming demands of a business start-up, the concentration required to keep it on track, the daily pressures of life and its myriad of responsibilities, all work together to seduce us into living for some other purpose. We all know of people who are sacrificing the people in their lives for something else, like professional success. They pay for this success with failure in their relationships. So, we have to ask: Are they really successful?

Part of our problem with keeping relationships in focus is that we are dealing with a cultural blind spot. *We are not good at relationships...and we don't know it!*

INDIVIDUALISM: A CULTURAL BLIND SPOT

How would you describe the color red to someone blind from birth? How can we *see* the people in our lives for what they really are, born and bred as we have been on individualism? Individualism is the belief that a person can live without needing others—that he can thrive by relying only on himself. This is one of the ideas that we inherited from the Renaissance.

In medieval society, personal identity was defined at birth by that which you belonged to—which church, which family or which landowner. Individuality was repressed. The Renaissance brought a rebirth of self-awareness, of faith in the individual’s capacity to create and achieve. Leonardo de Vinci, Michelangelo, Christopher Columbus, Copernicus and Martin Luther, all of whom lived within the span of a single generation (1490 to 1520), opened the windows of a stuffy society and brought people to new levels of personal freedom and creativity. Each, in his own way, affirmed the autonomy of the individual. Together, they set in motion a trend that continues to this day.

Individuality is an important idea. The Scriptures teach us to value the individual. They teach us that people have both the right and the responsibility to think and to choose for themselves. It is when we carry this truth to the extreme, when we make it an *ism*, that we run into trouble.

The doctrine of individualism promotes the notion that the pursuit of self-fulfillment is the highest good—that this is something we *owe* ourselves. We make heroes of those among us who seem to succeed at this. We admire people like J.P. Morgan or King Gillette whose entrepreneurial achievements seem to have been done single-handedly. We take little notice that the personal lives of many of these heroes are tales of disaster.

Individualism of this sort is a facade. Is it success when we sacrifice one part of our lives for achievement in another? Because we believe this myth and pursue it, we justify our selfish lifestyles and excuse the neglect of the people in our lives for the sake of the chase! Men, especially, in our society tend to have very few friends. Instead, they have competitors and customers. As we live out the myth, we drive to work alone. At day’s end we retreat into our home entertainment centers where we relax alone. The kids have their own TVs so they won’t bother us. We have constructed a society that accommodates and perpetuates this myth that self-promotion is the road to fulfillment.

Why are we surprised that we find it so hard to make marriages and childrearing work? Why is it that, although we live surrounded by people, we still feel somehow disconnected and isolated? Why are so many relationships conflict-ridden?

Questions for thought:

1. Can you identify with this description of our society? What would you add? What would you delete?

2. Stop and think! Is there a relationship in your life that you feel you need to improve, or that needs reconciliation? Write down the name of the person and what you’d like to see happen. Keep the relationship in mind as you work through this module.
